In the Claims:

1-12 (Cancelled)

13. (Currently Amended) Overvoltage protection means, comprising:

a first electrode,

a second electrode,

a breakdown spark gap having a discharge space formed between the electrodes, an arc forming between the electrodes within the discharge space when the breakdown spark gap is ignited, and

a housing which holds the electrodes,

wherein the discharge space is configured in a manner which runs at least one of partially transversely and partially opposite a direction of an electrical field of a prevailing line voltage so that a distance to be overcome by the arc between the two electrodes has a component that is transverse relative said direction of the electrical field; and

wherein the discharge space extends from a radially outer area of the face of one of the electrodes to a diametrically opposite radially outer area of the face of the other of the electrodes.

14. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 13, wherein the discharge space has at least three regions, a first region of which is connected to the first electrode, a second region of which is connected to the second electrode and a third region of which is connected between the first region and the second region.

15. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 14, wherein the third region runs essentially perpendicularly to the direction of the electrical field of the prevailing line voltage.

16. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 14, wherein the third region runs partially obliquely to the direction of the electric field of the prevailing line voltage.

17. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 14, wherein the third region runs partially opposite the direction of the electric field of the prevailing line voltage.

18. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 13, wherein a side of the first electrode facing the second electrode and a side of the second electrode facing the first electrode are partially covered with one of an electrically insulating material and a material of high electrical resistance, an uncovered region of the first electrode and an uncovered region of the second electrode being arranged transversely offset relative to one another.

19. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 13, wherein a side of the first electrode facing the second electrode and a side of the second electrode facing the first electrode are partially covered with an electrically insulating material, an uncovered region of the first electrode and an uncovered region of the second electrode being arranged offset to one another, wherein a side of the insulating material facing the second electrode and a side of the insulating material facing the first electrode are at least partially covered with a material of high electrical resistance, the first electrode being electrically conductively connected to the material of high electrical resistance on the side of the insulating material facing the second electrode in an area remote from the uncovered region of the first electrode and the second electrode being electrically conductively connected to the material of high electrical resistance side of the insulating material facing the first electrode in an area remote from the uncovered region of the second electrode.

20. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 13, further comprising an active ignition aid.

21. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 20, wherein the active ignition aid comprises a series connection of a voltage switching device and an ignition element connected to the two electrodes, the sparkover voltage of the voltage switching device being below the sparkover voltage of the breakdown spark gap so that a diversion current first flowing via the ignition element when the voltage switching device responds.

22. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 21, wherein the voltage switching device is one of a varistor, suppressor diode and a gas-filled voltage arrester.

23. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 21, wherein the ignition element comprises one of a conductive plastic, a metal material and a conductive ceramic and is in mechanical contact with the second electrode.

24. (Previously Presented) Overvoltage protection means as claimed in claim 13, wherein the housing is a metal pressure housing and has an inner insulation housing.